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SUBJECT: BRAZIL: FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF MILITARY COUP

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1. (SBU) Introduction and Summary. Unlike the civil-military contretemps surrounding the 28th anniversary of Argentina's military coup (reftel), Brazil has marked the 40th anniversary (March 31) of its coup in a more circumspect fashion. The monumental transition to full democracy during the last two decades seems almost taken for granted in much of the coverage, as the Brazilian media has focused on unresolved human rights cases, rehashed the conditions that led to the military action, and opined on other long-term effects of the military's nineteen-year regime. While steadily receding, the military regime era still casts some shadows on Brazil-U.S. relations. End introduction and summary

Forty Years Ago  
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2. (SBU) Mainstream Brazilian news outlets have detailed the circumstances and legacy of the 1964 military coup that ousted President Goulart and ushered in two decades of "General-Presidents." While bemoaning the military's human and civil rights violations, misguided pharaonic projects in the Amazon, and ultimately failed economic policies, some pundits credit the military presidents for modernizing Brazil, and occasionally standing up to the United States. This "on the other hand" praise recalls comments by then-candidate Lula da Silva in 2002, who credited the same military government that jailed him with pursuing strategic planning that benefited the country. Other legacies of that era have received less media attention. These include the unwieldy, novel-sized 1988 Constitution -- an over-reaction to the dictatorship that hobbled effective governance by minutely detailing a vast range of states' and citizens' rights -- and the inordinate influence of the regime-endorsed opposition party, the PMDB, which evolved into a patronage machine that still frustrates presidents today.

The Military Today  
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3. (SBU) Not surprisingly, the Brazilian military is perhaps the single Brazilian institution most changed since the dictatorship era. The military's experience in governance was in large measure controversial and frustrating, and today's soldiers want no part in politics. The Brazilian armed forces are now securely under civilian authority, and willingly play a diminished role in national decisionmaking. Although Brazil's constitution gives the military an internal order role in crises, officers no longer see themselves as the nation's bulwark against incompetent politicians. Instead, they are keenly focused on professionalism, seeking to protect national borders, prepare for peacekeeping missions and provide assistance to remote populations. The change is widely perceived and public opinion polls consistently show the military among the country's most trusted institutions, even though its funding has plummeted through the years.

4. (SBU) There remains some negative residue. There is a feeling among some older and retired officers that the steps the military took to move the country back toward democracy are not appreciated today. And there remains a subtle degree of rancor toward the USG, owing to a sense among some older officers that the U.S. switched abruptly from supporting the military government to condemning it for human rights violations. In addition, the Brazilian military's reluctance to take on some counterdrug and crime control missions which could involve violent engagement with civilians is reinforced by lingering questions about unresolved 1970s counterinsurgency-related disappearances.

Economic Legacy  
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5. (SBU) The most trumpeted positive aspect of the dictatorship was its supposed "economic miracle," commonly attributed to the direction of state industrial development by skilled teams of non-ideological technocrats. Brazil's GDP growth was said to be the world's highest from the late 1960s until halted by the world oil crisis in the 1970s. The dictatorship completed monster energy and infrastructure projects. The generals also nurtured and protected (with

rigid market reserves) some key heavy industries (e.g. automobiles) and "strategic" production, most notably informatics. (Ironically, it was in part the emphasis on protected heavy industries that made the labor movement's strikes in the 1970s such effective platforms for the growing democratic opposition.)

16. (SBU) At the same time, it eventually became recognized that the "miracle" did little to lessen Brazil's historic curse of poverty and income disparities -- wealth accrued mostly to the elite and a slowly broadening middle class in the south and also brought benefits to industrial workers, but the country's poor grew poorer. Even the statistics upon which the regime based its claims of overall growth transpired toward the end to be debatable. In the context of official economic policies and attitudes, Brazil's dictatorship left few discernible marks. Everyone in both public and the private sectors here acknowledges that the state can never again dispose of the resources to launch a broad-based development design.

#### Some Lingering Repercussions for U.S. Interests

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17. (SBU) Some journalists and academics portray the U.S. as directly encouraging the coup plotters, or at least having foreknowledge of the planning. Some of the more sensationalist publications draw labored parallels between 1964 and the level of U.S. influence in Brazil today. But other Brazilian reporters note that the USG has provided greater access to documents and tape recordings of official conversations from that era than are available in Brazilian archives, and "O Estado de Sao Paulo's" 31 March edition featured an essay by former U.S. Ambassador Lincoln Gordon (1961-65) debunking accusations of USG collusion with the coup makers. Most informed observers have concluded that the Brazilian civilian political leadership of that era bears a significant measure of responsibility, and that the generals and admirals who mounted the coup were prepared to move regardless of U.S. signals.

18. (SBU) Weekly newsmagazine VEJA has pointed out that an important legacy of the military regime is the state of Brazil's nuclear program. The dictatorship's failed attempts to fabricate a nuclear weapon and its cooperation with Iraq and others still color Brazilian policy decisions. The militarization of that program contributed to Brazil's not signing the NPT until 1998 and for a time slowed Brazil's evolution into a regional non-proliferation success story.

19. (SBU) The coup also indirectly built up the prestige Fidel Castro still holds among Brazil's left. Goulart's flirtation with Castro and Che had rankled the Brazilian military even before the coup. Castro's support for the failed Brazilian insurgents of the early 1970s and opposition political and union movements still endear him to key members of the current government, some of whom sought refuge in Cuba during the military era, including Presidential Chief of Staff Jose Dirceu.

#### Water Under the Bridge

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10. (SBU) Comment. Two of Brasilia's three bridges are named after military presidents. The third and newest commemorates a popular civilian president who lost his political rights under the military regime and whose death some blame on the dictatorship. Brazil's culture, economy, and political life still contain many such ironies (e.g., Brazil's privately-owned aviation giant EMBRAER began as a parastatal sinecure for ex-Air Force officers in 1969, and Foreign Minister Amorim and his left-leaning Deputy Minister worked for a film parastatal during the dictatorship.). The harsher aspects of the dictatorship and the long return to democracy are not forgotten. However, 40 years since the coup and 19 years since the return to civilian rule, the military era is of less and less relevance to a forward-looking society in which a third of the population was born after the restoration of democracy. Brazil's civil and political institutions are now fully democratic, the military is a respected (if underfunded) professional force, and some of the opposition figures of the military era are now running the country.

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